MS # P-041jj

GERMAN ARMY HIGH COMMAND

General Critique of MSS # P-041a - P-041hh and a Report on the June 1944 - March 1945 Period

By

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Heinz Wilhelm GUDERIAN
Generaloberst a.D.
Date of birth: 17 June 1888
Place of birth: Kulm on the Vistula
(now Polish territory)

At the age of thirteen GUDERIAN joined the Cadet Corps in Karlsruhe in Baden, one of the southern States of Germany. Two years later, in 1903, he was transferred to the Chief Cadet Center at Berlin-Lichterfelde, from which he graduated in 1907, in which year he joined the X Jaeger Battalion as an officer candidate. In January 1908, after a year at the Metz Officer Training School, he received his commission as second lieutenant with rank dated June 1906. After further service in field units he attended the Berlin War Academy in 1913-14.

Throughout World War I GUDERIAN served in various posts, rotating between field units and General Staff appointments and in 1918 was awarded General Staff Corps status. During the inter-war period he served as company commander, technical staff officer in the Reichswehr (Defense) Ministry, as general staff officer in divisional staffs and in the Transportation Staff of the Reichswehr Ministry, commander of a motor transport battalion, chief of staff in the Motor Transport Inspectorate, chief of staff of the Panzer Forces Command (Kommando der Panzertruppe), Commanding General, 2d Panzer Division, Commanding General XVI Infantry Corps and finally as Chief of Mobile Forces.

Promoted colonel in 1933, Generalmajor in 1936, Generalleutnant in February and General der Panzer in November 1938, General GUDERIAN was placed in command of the XIX Panzer Corps when World War II broke out on 1 September 1939. It was while in command of this panzer corps that the general carried out the operations in Poland that brought him fame and made him the most popular panzer commander in Germany.

At the end of the Polish campaign General GUDERIAN was transferred to the West front with his corps and in

June 1940 was placed in command of Panzergruppe* Guderian, with which he took part in the French campaign. It was during this assignment, in July 1940, that GUDERIAN was promoted Generaloberst. In June 1941 he was transferred with his panzergruppe to the East front and in October of the same year the panzergruppe was reorganized into an army, the Second Panzer Army.

In December 1941 the General was relieved of his command and placed in the Army High Command General Officer Reserve. His next assignment, in February 1943, was as Inspector General of Panzer Forces on all fronts, which assignment he held until the cessation of hostilities. In addition to this post, General GUDERIAN served as Acting Chief of Army General Staff from July 1944 to March 1945. He was finally captured near Zell am See, Tyrol, on 10 May 1945.

* A panzer army without rear zone administrative echelon.

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I. GENERAL CRITIQUE OF MSS# P-041a - P-041hh, THE GERMAN ARMY HIGH COMMAND

The overall study deals chiefly with the organizational aspects of the Army High Command and insofar is an objective work. However, in some parts, certain contributors have digressed from the common theme. In doing so, they have been motivated by opposition to the institution of the Wehrmacht High Command*, by the idea of the so-called "traditional predominance of the Army" by an attempt to solve all problems from the operational angle -- through the Operations Branch, and, finally, by an effort to justify their own attitudes.

Hitler is subjected to purely negative criticism; in the process, the mistakes made by other men are overlooked. Some contributors extend their criticism to a period when they themselves were no longer members of the Army High Command; in such cases, the criticism contains many errors.

In appraising the activity of the Army High Command after the appointment of a new Chief of the Army General Staff in the autumn of 1942, certain contributors forget that the successors of Generaloberst Halder inherited a situation which they could not improve, no matter how capable or willing

* Unified Command of the Armed Forces

they were. This applies to the relations between the Army High Command, on the one hand, and Hitler, the Wehrmacht High Command and the Army Personnel Office on the other hand, as well as the powers of the Chief of the Army General Staff and to the military situation and the possibilities it provided in respect to materiel, organization and strategy.

Up to the end of March 1945, the Wehrmacht High Command was not the superior of the Army High Command. One of the most regrettable mistakes of German pre-war military leaders was their failure to resolve what has been described as "the conflict which found its natural expression in the ambiguities and internal contradictions of the top-level organization of the Wehrmacht." In actual practice this conflict had to be decided by political factors, namely by Hitler.

Hitler was just as fully aware of the existence of the "ambiguities and internal contradictions" as he was of the fact that the men concerned rejected his ideas and in many cases also disapproved of him. He also knew the weakness of the military leaders and the lack of unity among them.

The Army, or more correctly a group of its senior generals, was obsessed with the idea that even in the age of the airplane, the submarine and the tank, the Army had to assert its "traditional position" as the preponderant part of the armed forces of a continental power. The generals concerned

still regarded the infantry as the chief arm and considered all other arms and services as secondary, to be suppressed if they could no longer be ignored. This attitude was the cause of the bitter opposition to any large-scale development of the air force and the tank arm. It was also the cause of the bitter opposition to the development of a modern unified system of command of the entire armed forces and to the Wehrmacht High Command and the Wehrmacht Akademie* as the first beginnings of this system.

These senior generals dominated the Army General Staff and pursued a personnel policy which insured that the most important General Staff positions in the Central Branch were always held by men of their way of thinking. They also prevented any strengthening of the Wehrmacht High Command and even the creation of an Armed Forces General Staff.

Very soon Hitler's distrust was aroused, a distrust which Goering and the National Socialist Party shared and which was never removed. Hitler's distrust found its first expression in the establishment of the Waffen-SS. His next step was the dismissal of von Blomberg, Minister of War, whose position he himself assumed as Supreme Commander of the Wehrmacht.

The dismissal of Freiherr von Fritsch, Commander in Chief of the Army, which took place at the same time under

* The German equivalent of the US National War College

unsavory circumstances, showed as early as 4 February 1938 how far Hitler's original respect for the top-level military command had declined.

When the successor of von Fritsch failed to obtain full satisfaction for the affront which the Army had suffered, the circles concerned failed to react appropriately and Hitler's respect for them declined still further.

More acute differences of opinion developed over policies in the Sudeten and Polish questions and over rearmament policies, with the result that, as has been stated, "the Commander in Chief of the Army was excluded, even before the war, from all strategic planning and the forming of political decisions." Even this exclusion was accepted in silence.

The silence with which the responsible military leaders accepted these measures, which they now condemn so vehemently, was interpreted by the younger categories of officers as implied approval. These younger officers could not conceive that their superiors would accept without a struggle and without proper action a development which those superiors, as they now allege, clearly recognized at the time as disadvantageous and even pernicious. However, this is precisely what did happen, and it happened at a time when it was still possible to offer resistance -- in peacetime.

The unhappy fraticidal conflict -- the behind-the-scenes

struggle for power between the leading officers of the Army in the Wehrmacht and Army High Commands -- gave Hitler a pretext to intervene in military affairs, since he realized that the Wehrmacht High Command was unable to overcome the stiff resistance of the Army High Command without his help. Small wonder that this struggle for power had a "disorganizing" effect.

Primarily, it was the Army High Command which must be blamed for this development. Indubitably, the Wehrmacht High Command was the highest military authority of the Reich and could have obtained adequate powers and efficient men easily if the Army High Command had cooperated intelligently. Military leadership during war is not obtained by coordination but by command; if the highest military agency is denied due command authority, intervention by the head of the State is essential and in no way surprising. In the German Armed Forces the consequences soon became apparent as what has been called "Symptoms of Disorganization."

For the rest, I agree with the comments by Generaloberst Zeitzler.

II. THE GERMAN ARMY HIGH COMMAND, JULY 1944 - MARCH 1945

1. On the whole, Generaloberst Zeitzler has given a correct description of Hitler's personality and of his activity as Supreme Commander of the Wehrmacht and Commander in Chief of the Army.

It should be added that Hitler was physically and mentally ill. I do not know the cause of his illness, nor when it began or whether it was curable. In any case, it existed in 1943, that is, before the attempt on his life, after which it worsened at a growing pace. The examination of his medical history and the influence of his illness on his character and on his behavior as Commander in Chief must probably be left to specialists and some later time. The purpose here is merely to mention the fact.

2. I also agree with Generaloberst Zeitzler's description of the position and activity of the Chief of the Army General Staff. Cooperation with Hitler became even more difficult after the attempt on his life than it had been before. Personal reports in private were no longer permitted; Generalfeldmarschall Keitel and two stenographers always had to be present.

The situation reports were scheduled for the night hours and lasted longer and longer. Frequently, it was impossible to leave before five o'clock in the morning. The tone of the discussions became more and more irritable as the burden of

the war weighed more and more heavily on everybody concerned.

In view of the tense situation, the Chief of the Army General Staff* requested authority to issue orders to the commanders of Army groups on the Eastern front, in order to avoid the eternal delays caused by the existing chain of command. This request was refused by Hitler, as was the request for authorization to issue instructions to the entire Army General Staff in matters of training and education. The Chief of the Army General Staff was forbidden to submit his resignation, Hitler reserving to himself the right to decide when he would dismiss him. In 1945, mutual relations became more and more strained from week to week, until they were finally severed on 28 March 1945.**

No new Chief of the Army General Staff was appointed. When the Russian and American fronts established contact, the theaters of operations were reorganized for the last time. In the new organization there was no longer a Chief of the Army General Staff or an Army High Command.

3. Up to the end of the war the army group commanders remained in the circumstances described by Generaloberst Zeitzler. Relations between them and the Chief of the Army

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* It should be noted that the author himself was Chief of the Army General Staff during the period under review in this manuscript (Reviewer).

** The date on which the author was relieved of his post as Chief of the Army General Staff.

General Staff were based on the best possible spirit of military comradeship and remained untroubled until the latter was dismissed.

4. The Army General Staff. After 20 July 1944, the Operations Branch, the Eastern Intelligence Branch and the newly established Fortifications Branch were combined to form the Tactical Group of the Army High Command (Fuehrungsgruppe OKH) and placed under the direction of Generalleutnant Wenck. At the same time General Wenck was appointed as permanent Deputy Chief of the Army General Staff. The purpose of this measure was to concentrate the most important branches for the conduct of operations in one hand and to relieve the strain on the Chief of the Army General Staff.

The Fortifications Branch was created because the Chief of the Army General Staff had finally succeeded, after 20 July 1944, in overcoming Hitler's long-standing opposition to the preparation of rear positions and the restoration of the Eastern fortresses. From then on he was able to organize and put into effect a large-scale Eastern fortifications program. The program included the activation of new fortress units from various branches of the service (infantry, machine gun, antitank gun, artillery, engineer and signal units). Thereupon the fortifications were armed with captured weapons

and stocked with supplies.

At the suggestion of the Chief of the Army General Staff, closer cooperation was secured between the Western Intelligence Branch and the Wehrmacht Operations Staff.

The Attache Branch was placed under the Chief of the Wehrmacht High Command, since it had become almost valueless to the Army. Any attache reports which still might have arrived were to be forwarded to the Chief of the Army General Staff.

Whereas these measures could be ordered on the authority of the Chief of the Army General Staff, the expansion of the powers of the Chiefs of Arms and Services presented great difficulties, since any such measures required the approval of the Commander of the Replacement Army (Himmler). However, even this was accomplished by December 1944 in the way described in the individual studies on the Chiefs of Arms and Services. (MSS # P-041k - o).

As far as operations are concerned, the Eastern front continued on the strategic defensive after 20 July 1944. This situation was in no way changed by localized attacks, such as the small-scale attacks to re-establish contact with Army Group North, which had been cut off. After the heavy losses of the summer and autumn, it was very difficult to halt the retreat of the Eastern front. However, even after it had been halted, the "stabilized" Eastern Front was merely a

house of cards, which collapsed in the face of the powerful Russian offensive of 12 January 1945. This situation was only slightly affected by the fortifications which had been prepared with such great diligence, because almost all the garrisons and weapons which had been earmarked for them had to be sent to the hardpressed armies in the West, so that the eastern defenses remained unmanned.

Strict economy was exercised with rigid consistency in all organizational work. All tables of organization and equipment were reduced; this alone made it possible to organize twenty-five Volksgrenadier divisions, ten artillery corps, twelve rocket projector brigades and ten panzer brigades, as well as numerous other units with good equipment and useful personnel.

A new impulse was given to training chiefly through the increased activity of the Chiefs of Arms and Services, who worked with the greatest zeal and intelligence in their newly assigned spheres of influence. Up to the bitter end, everything humanly possible was done to train young soldiers well before sending them to the front, and many new field manuals were published.

The Intelligence Service did excellent work up to the end. Unfortunately it received no recognition from Hitler, since its conscientious predictions, which were borne out by events, did not conform to the picture of the situation as he imagined it.

Both the supply and administration and the transportation services did very good work up to the end of the war, although the difficulties with which both organizations had to contend increased month by month and although all their calculations were repeatedly upset by air attacks.

No changes were made in the training of General Staff Corps officers until the military situation made it necessary to close the Kriegsakademie*.

Friction with the Chief of the Army Personnel Office increased in connection with the General Staff Corps personnel files.

The liaison officers and the Headquarters Commandant functioned smoothly.

5. Army General Staff - Wehrmacht High Command - Wehrmacht Operations Staff relations were very tense before the attempted assassination on 20 July 1944. In view of the crisis at the fronts and within the top-level command, these relations had to be improved if there was to be any hope at all of still saving the Reich. To a certain degree this improvement was actually achieved. Admittedly, certain traits in the characters of the Chiefs of the Wehrmacht High Command and the Wehrmacht Operations Staff, as described by

* The German equivalent of the US Command and General Staff School

Generaloberst Zeitzler, caused repeated difficulties and above all made it hard to persuade Hitler to see the soldiers' point of view. The most serious disputes arose in connection with the question of halting the Ardennes offensive between Christmas 1944 and New Year's Day 1945, because the Wehrmacht Operations Staff was unwilling to admit that its offensive had failed and did not take the danger in the East seriously. The request for the timely release of forces for the East was refused. The result was the annihilating effect of the Russian offensive.

6. Relations and cooperation between the Army General Staff and the other branches of the Wehrmacht were likewise difficult before the attempt of July 1944. Even later, the Chiefs of the Army and Luftwaffe General Staffs, failed to induce Goering to adopt a more sympathetic attitude in spite of their mutual efforts to do so. Goering disliked working. Cooperation with Grossadmiral Doenitz was better and the only point on which a dispute arose with him was in connection with the evacuation of Kurland*.

* Now known as the Kurzeme and Zemgale provinces of Latvia. The Navy opposed evacuation of the area, in which bases for the training of submarine units were situated. (Reviewer)

III. CONCLUSION

The above statements refer to the period from 20 July 1944 to the end of the war and are intended to supplement the comments by Generaloberst Zeitzler in MS # P-041ii. They are intentionally brief in order to avoid making the overall study more voluminous than it already is.

A further purpose of my statements is to throw the proper light on the achievements of my fellow officers in the Army High Command during the period after 20 July 1944, a period in which it was difficult to command and which it is now so easy to criticize.

/s/ Heinz Guderian